

Common Core State Standards – Maine Introduction

General background

The [Common Core State Standards Initiative](#) is a significant and historic opportunity for states to collectively develop and adopt a core set of academic standards in mathematics and English Language Arts, which includes literacy in history/social studies, science and technical subjects. The Common Core State Standards, released June 2, 2010, build directly on recent efforts of leading organizations and states that have focused on developing college- and career-ready standards and ensuring these standards are evidence- and research-based and internationally benchmarked to top-performing countries. These core standards represent critical learning targets for literacy and numeracy. Each state must decide whether or not to adopt these standards as its own.

In the 2010-2011 school year, Maine began implementing the Common Core State Standards for English and mathematics by conducting an alignment study and gap analysis, providing professional development and support for instruction, and by working with other adopting states to develop an aligned assessment system.

Understanding the Common Core Standards

Educational standards identify the skills and knowledge that students should have when they graduate from high school, and benchmark the development of those knowledge- and skill-sets either grade-by-grade, or over the course of a grade span.

Standards are established to ensure that all students, no matter where they live, are prepared for success in postsecondary education (college, technical training, etc.) and the workforce.

To achieve this, educational standards help teachers by providing clear goals for student learning. ***Standards do not tell teachers how to teach***, but they do help teachers identify the knowledge and skills their students should have so educators can develop appropriate instructional planning.

Standards also help students and parents by setting clear and realistic goals for success.

Standards are a first step – a key building block – in providing our young people with a high-quality education that will prepare them for success in college and work. Of course, standards are not the only thing that is needed for our children's success, but they provide an accessible roadmap for our teachers, parents, and students.

Historically, each state had its own process for developing, adopting, and implementing standards. As a result, what students are expected to learn varies widely from state to state.

- **Common Core Standards**

The Common Core State Standards Initiative is a state-led effort to establish a *single set* of clear educational standards for Mathematics and English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects that span kindergarten thru grade 12, that states can share and voluntarily adopt. The standards have been informed by the best available evidence and the highest state standards in the country – and around

the globe. Designed by a diverse group of teachers, experts, parents, and school administrators, as well as research from the early childhood and higher education communities, they reflect both our aspirations for our children and the realities of the classroom.

The Common Core standards are designed to ensure that students graduating from high school are prepared to go to college or enter the workforce, providing parents, teachers, and students with a clear understanding of what is expected of them. The standards are benchmarked to international standards to guarantee that our students are competitive in the emerging global marketplace.

- **Content Areas**

Mathematics and English Language Arts, including Literacy in History/Social Studies Science and Technical Subjects were the first subjects chosen for the Common Core State Standards because these two subjects serve as foundational skills and knowledge upon which students build skill sets across all other subject areas. They are also the subjects most frequently assessed for accountability purposes. Plans are already underway for the development of a common set of standards in science and in social studies. Educators in other content areas have also expressed interest in developing common standards

How Common Core Standards Help Maine

Every child across the country deserves to have the tools to succeed. High standards that are consistent across states provide teachers, parents, and students with a set of clear expectations that everyone can work toward together. This will ensure that we maintain America's competitive edge, so that all of our students are well prepared with the skills and knowledge necessary to compete with not only their peers here at home, but with students from around the world.

The Common Core standards will be adopted by most states. Resources we once had to develop on our own, or with a small group of states, will now be widely available. Far more high quality materials and support will become available for a lower cost. The pool of expertise available to us will grow considerably, and our students will be the beneficiaries.

These materials and supports will include world-class professional development, known to be one of the most important contributors to developing a high quality teaching force, and rigorous, informative assessments. Maine spends millions of dollars each year developing assessments with three other New England states; soon we will be able to share the cost of test development and administration with most of the states in the country.

After decades talking about it, we will finally be able to compare all Maine to students in other states on a similar set of standards and assessments. We will be able to learn from successes – both in-state and in other states – and identify areas where we need to improve. Common standards will provide a greater opportunity for the sharing experiences and best practices both within states and across the country. Such collaboration can lead to an improved ability to best serve English language learners and young people with disabilities. Additionally, the K-12 English language arts and mathematics standards include information on application of the standards for English language learners and students with disabilities.

The Common Core State Standards will help colleges and professional development programs better prepare teachers; provide the opportunity for teachers to be involved in the development of assessments linked to these top-quality standards; allow states to develop and provide better assessments that more accurately measure whether or not students have learned what was taught; and provide educators with teaching strategies and tools they can use in developing their curricula.

These standards are a common sense first step toward ensuring our children are getting the best possible education no matter where they live.

Maine and the Common Core

- **Who Facilitated the Development of the Common Core Standards?**

The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association (NGA) Center have been leading the standards development process in consultation with teachers, parents, experts, and administrators. As development progressed, several working groups and committees were formed to ensure that the process was open, inclusive, and rigorous.

- **Retaining State and Local Control of our Schools**

The federal government is *not* involved in the development of the standards. This has been a state-led and state-driven initiative from the beginning. States will voluntarily adopt the standards based on the timelines and context in their state.

However, the federal government will have the opportunity to support states as they begin adopting the standards. For example, the federal government can:

- Support this effort through a range of tiered incentives, such as providing states with greater flexibility in the use of existing federal funds, supporting a revised state accountability structure, and offering financial support for states to implement the standards.
- Provide long-term financial support for the development and implementation of common assessments, teacher and principal professional development, and research to help continually improve the Common Core State Standards over time.
- Revise and align existing federal education laws with the lessons learned from the best of what works in other nations and from research.

- **Retaining Local Control of Curriculum**

The standards will provide important goals for teachers to ensure they are preparing students for success in college and the workforce. They will help teachers develop and implement effective strategies for their students by providing benchmarks for skills and knowledge that their students should have by the end of the year. Standards will be common; curricula will not – they will be local.

- **Supporting Maine and Maine’s Students**

Standards and curricula are not the same thing. Common standards put us all on the same page in terms of understanding what our students need to know – Maine has had a set of standards used statewide since 1997.

Curriculum is about what we teach – how we get students to achieve the standards. In Maine, curriculum is determined locally, with support and guidance from the state and based on the state’s standards.

Instruction is how we teach. So while a school district with a strong Franco-American history might choose to use fiction from that culture in eighth grade reading, the “standards” it would be teaching – things like plot and character development – would be the same as most anywhere else. Similarly, what a student needs to know about geometry is the same everywhere, even if different teachers use different methods to teach it.

Maine teachers, administrators and school boards will continue to determine the best ways for students to learn the material. With our strong history of rigorous standards and quality assessments, local districts will continue to determine how instruction of the state standards is implemented. Maine Department of Education specialists and educators from throughout the state have been deeply involved in the development of the Common Core standards, and were intent on making no compromise. We see the new standards as stronger and more rigorous than the ones we already have.

The Common Core standards provide clear expectations for students, parents and teachers, and provide “portability” – a student who moves from one district, or state, to another will be able to continue learning the same standards.

Our goal is to support students in leaving school ready for post-secondary education, careers and personal success and to contribute to a strong Maine economy.

- **Future of Maine’s Standards**

The Common Core standards will replace Maine’s standards for English language arts and mathematics found in our *Federal State and Local Accountability Standards (Chapter 131)* and *Learning Results: Parameters for Essential Instruction and Graduation Requirements (Chapter 132)*. The Department is conducting an alignment study and we are confident that the standards are close in both subject areas, especially in mathematics. In a few cases, some of the standards move ahead or back a year as compared to Maine’s, and are more focused providing more in-depth learning.

The transition to the new standards is according to the following estimated timeline:

2010-11

- Educators become familiar with the Common Core standards in English Language Arts and mathematics.

2011-12

- Educators incorporate initial Common Core classroom implementation activities.

2012-13

- Classroom instruction is based on Common Core standards

2014-15

- New assessment system through the Smarter Balanced Coalition begins (see Assessment, below)

The content standards in the other content areas of Maine's *Learning Results* will remain in place at this time. There are some efforts to develop common standards in social studies and science; Maine is not obligated to sign on to those new standards when they are finalized but will look at them very closely; Maine's specialists are participating in this work.

Maine Adoption

With support from the Maine Legislature and the state Board of Education, the Maine Department of Education held a public hearing on August 30, 2010, to accept public comment and Commissioner Faherty provisionally adopted the standards on October 7, 2010. The Legislature is expected to give final approval in the next legislative session, which starts in January 2011.

Assessment

Like adoption of common core standards, assessment will ultimately be up to the states: some states have come together voluntarily to develop a common assessment system, based on the Common Core State Standards. A state-led consortium on assessment is grounded in the following principles: develop a higher quality assessment than any one state can on its own; create economies of scale; provide information and support more effective teaching and learning; prepare students for college and careers; and allow for comparison across students, schools, districts, states and nations.

The nation's governors and chief state school officers believe these new standards offer an unprecedented opportunity for states to work together to dramatically improve the quality, cost-effectiveness, and comparability of state assessments.

The full power of the Common Core State Standards will be realized when states align them to new, high-quality assessments that are internationally benchmarked and build toward college and career readiness. The overarching goal is to create next generation assessment systems that are more comparable across the nation and more cost-efficient than ever before.

- **Maine's Partnership in a National Consortium**

Maine is a member of the "SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium", which was formed from a merger of three consortia and is comprised of 31 states. The Consortium's priorities for a next generation assessment system are rooted in a concern for the valid, reliable, and fair assessment of the deep disciplinary understanding and higher-order thinking skills that are increasingly demanded by a knowledge-based economy.

These priorities are also rooted in a belief that assessment must support ongoing improvements in instruction and learning, and must be useful for all members of the educational enterprise: students, parents, teachers, school administrators, members of the public, and policymakers. The Consortium recognizes the need for a system that includes a variety of assessments, including: formative assessments (ongoing measures to assist in classroom teaching throughout the year) and summative assessments (more comprehensive measurements of achievement of standards over a longer period of time). These will be organized around the Common Core State Standards, which support high-quality learning and the demands of accountability. At the same time, they balance concerns for innovative assessment with the need for a fiscally sustainable system that is feasible to implement. The efforts of the Consortium will be organized to accomplish these goals.

- **Future of NECAP, MEA, and Other Maine Tests**

Maine will gradually transition our current assessment system to that of the national consortium, using new common assessments to measure reading and mathematics in grades 3 through 8 and high school. The Department is awaiting information from the US Department of Education as to how the assessment transition will be made from assessing our current standards to the Common Core. The NECAP states are currently discussing whether or not the assessment will include test items based on the Common Core standards before 2014-15 as all states have adopted the standards.

We will continue to use our own MEA science assessment for the immediate future. The federal government has released guidance on alternate standards for severely cognitively disabled students and Maine will examine next steps in the Personalized Alternate Assessment Portfolio (PAAP).